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O'Neill warns Reagan on Nicaragua pledge

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WASHINGTON — House Speaker Thomas P. O'Neill Jr. yesterday acknowledged President Reagan's "big victory" in the House on US aid to rebels fighting the Nicaraguan government, but warned that if Reagan does not keep the commitments he made in order to get the bill passed, the House would once again bar all aid to the rebels.

O'Neill said that he didn't like losing but that the fight was worth it because it had focused attention on the issue and resulted in Reagan's pledges that he would not attempt to overthrow the government of Nicaragua, that he would bargain bilaterally with the Sandinista government, that there would be no military aid and that the Central Intelligence Agency would not administer the humanitarian aid to the rebels.

"We intend to keep his feet to the fire and make sure he keeps those commitments," said O'Neill. If he doesn't, said the speaker, "We'll go to the floor with the amendment to close down all aid again."

Aboard Air Force One en route to New Jersey yesterday, Larry Speakes, deputy White House press secretary, said Reagan still favors funding the aid through the CIA but would have to "see how the [House-Senate] conference shakes down" to determine whether the administration will push hard for CIA control. Speakes said that he expected the conference to move quickly on the bill "and we could have action on it before July 4."

The House version of the contra aid bill bars the CIA or Defense Department as the channel for the aid; the Senate version designates the CIA as the administrator of the aid.

Speakes said: "We definitely favor it (the CIA) but how hard we are going to be or if we are going to be open to any negotiation will remain something that we just have to take up at the time."

The defeat suffered by O'Neill was in fact a one-two punch by the administration; the Speaker lost not only on the issue of \$27 million in non-military aid to the contras, but also on the Boland amendment to prohibit military aid to the rebels. The amendment, drafted by Rep. Edward Boland (D-Mass) and passed initially three years ago, was defeated by a 36-vote margin Wednesday. The prohibition currently in force expires Oct. 1.

A source close to the House leadership said he expected that the principle of the Boland amendment would be introduced again, when the Intelligence authorization bill comes to the floor this summer, but he said he was not sure of the outcome.

The source said that on the Republican side of the House it was clear that there would be "iron-clad" discipline against any effort to reinstate the Boland amendment. In addition, the source noted, because of President Daniel Ortega's mission to Moscow in April immediately after the House voted against aid to the contras there is now a large number of Southern Democrats in favor of the aid out of fear of being tagged as "soft on Communism."

O'Neill put much on the line in the contra fight. But, he acknowledged after Wednesday's vote, the White House did more work "than I have ever seen them do" to overturn the first House vote. Polls taken for the House Democratic leadership, he noted, show that even in the South voters are against shipping arms to the con-

tras and are opposed to US involvement in the overthrow of the Nicaraguan government. "The American people do not want American forces in Nicaragua," said O'Neill.

Nonetheless, the speaker asserted, "It is the thought, the desire and will of the president of the United States to use troops there ... That's what I think the president personally wants."

O'Neill said Alexander Haig, secretary of state in the first year of the Reagan administration, wanted to involve US troops in Nicaragua and Grenada "as quickly as possible."

And, said O'Neill, if the invasion of Grenada had gone as smoothly as the president predicted to congressional leaders the night before US forces landed there; "we would have gone into Nicaragua."

Instead, O'Neill said, Grenada was a "fiasco."

O'Neill said Wednesday, before the House vote, that he thought the president would use any means to bring down the Nicaraguan government. He said Reagan would like "to lead a contingent of Marines down Broadway," as in a B movie, after the invasion of Nicaragua.

O'Neill said he "hopes and prays [an invasion] won't happen" but that he intended to keep the pressure on the president in Central America "because it's the right thing for America."

The speaker said that in the past year he has spoken with 20 heads of state and all of them have told him "the president is wrong" on Nicaragua.